

Celebrating and commemorating the life of Rob Burrow CBE

Date: 19th June 2024

Report of: Chief Executive

Report to: Executive Board

Will the decision be open for call in? Yes No

Does the report contain confidential or exempt information? Yes No

Brief summary

This report outlines an approach to the city's and the Council's celebration and commemoration of a true Leeds legend, Rob Burrow CBE, who sadly died on 2nd June 2024 after suffering from Motor Neurone Disease (MND) since his diagnosis in late 2019. Rob was awarded Freedom of the City in 2023, along with Kevin Sinfield CBE.

Rob had a huge impact on so many people locally, regionally and nationally, both through his sporting prowess and also his tireless fight to raise awareness of MND and to raise funds for Leeds Hospitals Charity to support the development of a new MND Care Centre in Leeds, which is led by Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust and is currently under construction at Seacroft Hospital, to improve treatment for sufferers of the disease and ultimately to find a cure.

Rob has touched communities far beyond the world of rugby league and MND, by showing how to live courageously and also by illustrating the true meaning of friendship, through his relationship with his fellow rugby league superstar, Kevin Sinfield CBE, who has joined Rob in raising awareness and fundraising and has committed to continue to "bang the drum for MND" until a cure is found.

This report highlights how much adoration and recognition has already been shown for Rob and his family from across the world, including floral tributes, books of condolences, fundraising events and tribute applause at sporting events and school assemblies.

Importantly, this report is clear that the Council will engage with Rob's family and Leeds Rhinos to support the city's marking of Rob's life and legacy in the most appropriate and fitting way to support of Rob's ambitions of finding a cure for MND and building a new, dedicated MND centre in Leeds.

Recommendations

Members of Executive Board are asked to:

- a) Continue to support the celebration and commemoration of the life and contribution of Rob Burrow CBE to rugby league, the ongoing fight against Motor Neurone Disease and to showing the world how to live courageously and illustrating the meaning of true friendship.
- b) Support the work to mark Rob's life and legacy by engaging with Leeds Rhinos and Rob Burrow CBE's family in the most appropriate way in support of Rob's ambitions, including work to build the Leeds MND Centre and finding a cure for MND.

What is this report about?

1. This report outlines the Council's celebration and commemoration of a true Leeds legend, Rob Burrow CBE, who sadly passed away on 2nd June 2024 after suffering from Motor Neurone Disease (MND) since his diagnosis in late 2019. It also outlines the approach to engage with Rob's family to determine how best to mark Rob's life and legacy in the most appropriate and fitting way in support of Rob's ambitions for an MND centre and a cure for the disease.

The achievements of Rob Burrow CBE

2. Rob was small in stature but a huge rugby league star, spending his entire club career with Leeds Rhinos in the now famous number 7 shirt. He had a 17-year career, with nearly 500 appearances, winning eight Super League Grand Finals, three World Club Challenges and two Challenge Cups. Rob had 15 England and five Great Britain caps. Whilst battling the illness himself, Rob was inspirational in relentlessly raised awareness of MND, alongside fellow MND sufferers, including Scottish rugby union superstar Doddie Weir OBE, who sadly died in 2022. Rob fundraised millions of pounds for the Motor Neurone Diseases Association and Leeds Hospitals Charity, with the ultimate aim of building a new MND Care Centre in Leeds to support the needs of people suffering from MND and the finding of a cure for the disease.
3. At a Special Meeting of Leeds City Council in January 2023, Rob Burrow and Kevin Sinfield were made Honorary Freeman of the City of Leeds in recognition and appreciation of the honour and distinction brought to the city by their outstanding sporting achievements, their charitable work with Leeds Hospitals Charity and the MND Association and their support to the wider MND community. It feels appropriate for the Council to support further celebrations and commemorations of Rob following his death, through close engagement with his family and Leeds Rhinos.
4. Rob had a relentless positive and selfless attitude and exemplified all that is great about Leeds. As a rugby player, Rob typified the Leeds Rhinos team's attitude in using their influence for the good of communities in Leeds. As supporters of Child Friendly Leeds and other city initiatives linked to the work of the Leeds Rhinos Foundation, the team helped to inspire and improve the lives of many people of all ages. Rob, with other players, spent time visiting schools, sporting events and dementia, cancer recovery and weight-loss groups.
5. After Rob's retirement from rugby, he continued his connections with Leeds Rhinos, and with the city, consistently offering his time to assist with many community-focussed projects through the Leeds Rhinos Foundation and other Third Sector organisations. In late 2019, when Rob was Academy Team Coach at Leeds Rhinos, the devastating news of Rob's diagnosis with MND was announced. All of the years of teamwork, camaraderie, empathy and mutual respect

became vitally important, initially showing in support for Rob and his family and then expanding as support for the wider MND community nationally.

6. Since 2019, Rob and his family have shown an amazing amount of strength and dignity as they dealt with Rob's condition to make sure as many people could be helped as possible as they opened up their life publicly to inspire others.
7. Rob and his family undertook a huge amount of awareness-raising and fundraising. This included major events and in 2023, the inaugural Rob Burrow Leeds Marathon took place, a legacy for people to challenge themselves, a fundraiser and a sporting spectacle for the city. 14,000 people took part across both the 2023 and 2024 marathons and half-marathons combined to help raise funds in excess of £7million to date for the MND Association, the Leeds Hospitals Charity appeal to build the Rob Burrow Centre for MND and other charitable causes.
8. On 3rd June 2024, the day after Rob died, a "ground-breaking" event was held by Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust at the site of the new Rob Burrow Centre for Motor Neurone Disease at Seacroft Hospital to begin works to build the specialist centre in his name. Rob dedicated the last years of his life to raising millions of pounds to help others with MND, spear-heading a £6.8m charity appeal for Leeds Hospitals Charity, the official charity of Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust, who run the MND service for Leeds and the surrounding region, and which provided him with care, to build the first specialist centre for those with MND living in and around Leeds and beyond. The aim is the provision of a state-of-the-art facility designed to support the needs of people with MND and to create opportunities for patients to access new research and new treatments, making it a landmark centre for patients, their families and carers and clinical specialists in the region.
9. Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust are supporting Leeds Hospitals Charity in their bid to raise funds to complete the building of the Rob Burrow Centre for MND, which is a close-knit team of highly-skilled professionals, committed to going the extra mile to help those living with MND achieve the best quality of life possible. The aim is the creation of a bespoke centre that delivers excellent patient-centred care in a supportive, purpose-built environment suitable for the needs of the 21st century. Rob's vision was for people diagnosed with MND to have a place where they could feel comfortable and where there would be signs of both hope and optimism for them and their loved ones.

Tributes already taking place to celebrate Rob Burrow CBE's life and legacy

10. Even in the short time since Rob's death (less than a week at the time of writing), there has been a huge outpouring of love, respect and appreciation for the Leeds legend, illustrating the scale of the contribution Rob made to the rugby world and the fight against MND, as well as how he touched so many people through his bravery, courage and illustration of true friendship alongside Kevin Sinfield.
11. Alongside extensive and touching tributes on social media and celebratory applauses within many school settings, numerous floral tributes have been set up, including at Seacroft Hospital; by the Rob Burrow mural at Leeds Beckett University's Student Union off Woodhouse Lane; and at the South Stand at Headingley Stadium. The tributes at the South Stand have attracted a continuous stream of people all week, as individuals, fellow players and representatives from many sporting clubs and from other organisations in the city have paid their respects. Tributes have also been left further afield, including Pontefract (where Rob was born) and Castleford (where Rob grew up) and books of condolences at numerous rugby league clubs. There was a minute's applause at St James' Park, Newcastle, at the start of an England friendly international football game. Social media tributes have been from all sectors and all geographies, including

royalty, political, sporting, TV and media, many fellow MND sufferers and so many fans and members of the public who have been touched by this story and Rob's impact. An online book of condolence has also been established for people to share their memories of Rob.

12. The fundraising has continued since Rob's death, supported by ongoing media coverage, including a special BBC programme aired on the day after his death entitled "There's only one Rob Burrow".
13. The Leeds Rhinos Foundation invited everyone touched by Rob's story to take place in informal run of the Leeds Rhinos 7-mile route in Roundhay Park on 7th June 2024 at 7pm. The Foundation have also committed to donating 100% of all monies raised by their team during the 2024 Leeds 10km on 23rd June 2024 to Leeds Hospitals Charity for the Rob Burrow Centre for Motor Neurone Disease.
14. There have been further ongoing sporting tributes too. The Rugby League Challenge Cup Finals on 8th June 2024 kicked-off slightly later than originally planned to allow for a minute's applause at 3.07pm and the Leeds Rhinos Women's team, who were playing in the final, paid their respects by wearing black armbands. Leeds Rhinos netballers also wore black armbands this weekend for their game at Cardiff Dragons to mark Rob's death. Many Park Runs across the country held Rob Burrow special runs on the first weekend after Rob's passing. Leeds Rhinos have announced plans that their next home game will be a celebration of Rob's life on Friday 21st June. The MND Association also confirmed they are holding a legacy bike ride, celebrating 10 years since the Tour de France Grand Départ came to Yorkshire, which will set out from Roundhay Park on Rob Burrow Day, 7th July 2024.
15. Leeds Rhinos are coordinating with the Burrow family around details of Rob's funeral, which will take place in early July. This will be a private event for family and friends; however Leeds Rhinos say there will be a chance for members of the public to pay tribute to Rob, details of which will be published nearer the time. Leeds Rhinos are also working with the Council for a larger, civic event following Rob's funeral that will hopefully be streamed for the public to watch; again further details about this will be announced as they are finalised.

Continuing Rob Burrow CBE's legacy

16. Rob had a deep impact on the city of Leeds through his sporting achievements, the distinction with which he approached his illness and how he fought tirelessly to raise awareness of MND and to raise funds for Leeds Hospitals Charity to create an MND Centre to support those with those disease and also to find a cure. He was a superb example of the city's ambitious and optimistic spirit and of what Team Leeds is all about.
17. As a civic leader and convenor within the city, it is appropriate for the Council to support the continuation of Rob's legacy on behalf of the city through engaging with the Leeds Rhinos and Rob's family about how as a city we could do this in the most appropriate and fitting way, particularly to support Rob's ambitions for the MND Centre and ultimately the finding of a cure for MND, which would be the biggest legacy for Rob.
18. In the words of Rob Burrow, "In a world full of adversity, we must still dare to dream". As a city in which Rob had such a profoundly positive impact, there is a responsibility to continue his legacy alongside his family.

What impact will this proposal have?

19. By continuing Rob Burrow's work and legacy the fight against MND will be able to continue, including the completion of the MND Centre in Leeds, improvement of treatment and ultimately the finding of a cure.

How does this proposal impact the three pillars of the Best City Ambition?

- Health and Wellbeing
- Inclusive Growth
- Zero Carbon

20. The Best City Ambition is our overall vision for the future of Leeds, aiming to help everyone within the city to understand and support the valuable contribution everyone can offer, through our authentic Team Leeds approach.

21. Team Leeds is about supporting one another to make Leeds the best it can be, working in genuine partnership and being ambitious – that is exactly what Rob Burrow did with his family and friends in the fight against MND and it is exactly how so many in the city and beyond, both rugby-related and beyond, approached supporting Rob throughout his battle with MND.

22. There is much to learn from the celebration and commemoration of how Rob approached his fight against such a terrible disease. The strength of people coming together, united in grief but also paying tribute to an individual who has had such a huge impact on so many, epitomises what Team Leeds stands for in our city.

What consultation and engagement has taken place?

Wards affected:

Have ward members been consulted? Yes No

23. Although no formal consultation and engagement has taken place in relation to this report, the paying of respects and outpouring of adoration for Rob Burrow illustrates the impact he had on so many. For the city of Leeds to further mark the life and contributions of Rob in conjunction with his family and Leeds Rhinos would be fitting recognition of all he achieved and would reaffirm the strength of feeling that already exists for him.

What are the resource implications?

24. It is not anticipated that there will be any additional significant resource requirements.

What are the key risks and how are they being managed?

25. N/A

What are the legal implications?

26. N/A

Options, timescales and measuring success

What other options were considered?

27. The city and the Council could play a less active role in celebrating and commemorating the life of Rob Burrow, but that was not considered as the most appropriate approach given the impact he has had.

How will success be measured?

28. N/A

What is the timetable and who will be responsible for implementation?

29. There is no fixed timetable of definite plan for how the celebration and commemoration will be delivered as we will liaise and engage with Rob Burrow's family accordingly, but the Director of Strategy and Resources will be responsible for engaging and implementing plans as they are developed.

Appendices

None

Background papers

None